Merena

(fl. 363)

BRIEFING

Merena was a 4th-century Iranian military officer active during the reign of the Sasanian king (shah) Shapur II (r. 309–379). According to the Iranologist Touraj Daryaee, Merena's real name may have been Mihrān, thus making him a member of the House of Mihran, one of the Seven Great Houses of Iran. He was a cavalry commander in the Sasanian army in the course of the Roman-Persian Wars soon after the Battle of Ctesiphon in 363, which took place outside the Sasanian capital Ctesiphon in the province of Asoristan. As cavalry commander, he also appeared in the Battle of Maranga.

BIOGRAPHY

The Battle of Samarra

The Battle of Samarra took place in June 363, during the invasion of the Sasanian Empire by the Roman emperor Julian. After marching his army to the gates of Ctesiphon and failing to take the city, Julian, realizing his army was low on provisions and in enemy territory started marching towards Samarra.

The battle began as a Sasanian attack on the Roman rearguard, but developed into a major battle. Julian was wounded during the battle, and later died without choosing a successor. Following Julian's death, the Romans elected Jovian as emperor. Stranded deep in Sasanian territory and suffering from a lack of supplies, Jovian was forced to accept terms for peace.

Julian's Campaign

Julian invaded the Sasanian Empire with a force of 95,000 men, hoping to secure the eastern frontier and to replace Shah Shapur II with his brother Hormisdas. He split his force in two, one under his cousin Procopius numbering 30,000 men, which marched to northern Mesopotamia, and the other consisting of 65,000 men under his own leadership. Julian at first won a tactical victory outside Ctesiphon, but his army was too distracted with pillaging to take the city. Julian burned the fleet which he had brought down the river to Ctesiphon, and much of the baggage, leaving a bare three weeks supply. He then directed his march inland into the heart of Shapur's dominions, hoping to force a battle.

Battle

By June 363, Julian, realizing that he was trapped in Sasanian territory, started marching his army towards Samarra. The Roman army was under constant attack and Julian was informed the Sasanians were harassing the rear guard. Julian rode back, not waiting to don his breastplate, and when he arrived at the rear guard was told the left flank was under cavalry attack reinforced by elephants.

Riding towards the left flank, Julian rallied retreating Roman troops. The Sasanians seeing the Romans reforming started to retreat. Emboldened by this, Julian called for his troops to follow after him, and he charged toward the fleeing Sasanians. By this time his bodyguards, who were separated from Julian, called for him to pull back. At this point, Julian was struck in the side by a spear and fell from his horse. His bodyguards surrounded him, carried him back, and the army quickly pitched camp. Julian died from his wound at midnight.

According to Dignas and Winter, the Romans won this battle, while Touraj Daryaee states the Sasanian forces won the battle.

Aftermath

He was among those killed at the subsequent Battle of Samarra, a few hours before the death of the Roman emperor Julian.